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SUBJECT: CHINA'S ILLICIT ORDINATIONS ANGER VATICAN

REF: HONG KONG 1817

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CLASSIFIED BY: Peter Martin, Pol/Econ Chief, Vatican, State.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

Summary

¶1. (C) The Holy See released a statement May 4 roundly condemning the recent unauthorized ordinations of two Chinese priests as bishops. In strong language, it referred to the "profound disappointment" of Pope Benedict XVI, and to the automatic excommunication of the new bishops and those bishops who assisted at the unauthorized ordination rite. The Vatican blames the events on pressure and threats from "groups outside of the Church" - read: the Patriotic Association. Vatican officials told us that a strong statement was needed from the Holy See after this "provocation". Indeed, from the perspective of most here at the Vatican, the Holy See had no choice. Interested parties had lobbied the Holy See to accept these bishops. When the Vatican said no, and the ordinations went forward, the Holy See had to act. China expert (and editor of Rome-based Asia News Service) Fr. Bernardo Cervellera said that the ordinations had likely been orchestrated by the deputy chairman of the Patriotic Association, Liu Bainian. End Summary.

Vatican Angry

¶2. (SBU) The Holy See expressed anger May 4 at the unauthorized ordination of two Chinese priests as bishops. An official statement released March 4 (emailed to EUR/WE) roundly condemned the ordinations in what for the Holy See was the strongest of language, including references to the "profound disappointment" of Pope Benedict XVI, and to the automatic excommunication of the new bishops and those bishops who assisted at the unauthorized ordination rite. (Note: According to Canon Law, a mandate from the Holy See is needed prior to the ordination of every bishop of the Roman Catholic Church. Acting without the mandate results in automatic excommunication. End note.)

¶3. (SBU) The Vatican blames the events on pressure from "groups outside of the Church" - read: the Patriotic Association - which "pressured and threatened" the participants in the illicit ordinations. This action, according to the Holy See statement, violated not only the Catholic community but also individual consciences, and is therefore "a serious violation of

religious freedom." The Vatican put no stock in the claim that the ordinations were presented as necessary to ensure leadership for vacant ecclesiastical jurisdictions.

New Obstacles

¶4. (SBU) The Holy See statement expressed the Vatican's consideration for the difficult path of the Catholic Church in China, but said that it thought the "peculiarities" of that journey were a thing of the past. The Vatican said it wanted to vocalize the suffering of the bishops and priests who were forced to act against their consciences. The statement implied that the clerics involved never wanted the ordinations to go forward without the mandate from the Holy See. The Vatican expressed the hope that there would be no repeat of these "unacceptable acts of violence and intolerable force." The Holy See has on numerous occasions, according to the statement, expressed its openness to an honest and constructive dialogue with the Chinese authorities that would "satisfy the legitimate expectations of both parties." The unauthorized ordination of the two bishops "not only does not favor such a dialogue, but creates new obstacles to it."

Strong Response Needed

¶5. (C) Fr. Massimo Cenci, Undersecretary at the Pontifical Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples (the Holy See's missionary department and lead on Church business in China), told us May 4 that a strong statement was needed from the Holy See after this "provocation". [Note: The final word on the diplomatic aspects of China - Holy See relations lies with the Secretariat of State, but Cenci's department is in charge of the

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appointment of bishops in China.]

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Patriotic Association

¶6. (C) Cenci agreed with China expert (and editor of Rome-based Asia News Service) Fr. Bernardo Cervellera that the ordinations had likely been orchestrated by the deputy chairman of the Patriotic Association, Liu Bainian. Cervellera noted that Liu has consistently opposed any reconciliation between the Holy See and the Chinese government as this would lead to the Association's dissolution. He opined that the ordinations were Liu's personal response to the pope's having made Hong Kong bishop Joseph Zen a cardinal, and that Liu had at least the tacit approval of the government. Cenci speculated that Liu may well have overstepped his bounds, and the Chinese authorities may privately regret giving him so much leeway. Cervellera added that Chinese Catholics and most of the episcopate would shun the new bishops.

Comment

¶7. (C) From the perspective of most here at the Vatican, the Holy See had no choice but to make a strong statement in response to these illicit ordinations, the first since 2000. Interested parties (in one case, an American missionary priest with substantial background in China) had been lobbying the Holy See to accept these bishops. While formal notifications may have been lacking or tardy (reftel) the Vatican was well aware of the issues and the personnel. When the Holy See said no, and the ordinations went forward, the Vatican had to act. We defer to Embassy Beijing on whether this episode will precipitate a clash in China between the Patriotic Association and those in

favor of the establishment of full diplomatic relations between
China and the Holy See.
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